



Survivors

after suicide A Program of Didi Hirsch CMHC: Suicide Prevention Center of Los Angeles

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SAS exists to help people resolve their grief and pain in their own personal way, and to help them move forward in their lives, positively and productively.

Survivors as Advocates: Tentative Steps to Leaps and Bounds

By Karen M. Marshall, Arlington, VA

For decades, the effort to reduce deaths by suicide seemed as immobile as a glacier, with survivors frozen in grief and silence. The ice cap began thawing, I think, with the advent of survivor support groups. There, isolation and grief are lessened in the company of compassionate fellow survivors. Myths are dispelled, and stigma and guilt are addressed head-on.

With time and help, surviving can lead to healing, healing to living life again, living to thriving, and thriving to a desire to make a difference. So many survivors have made that transition, that now the glacier resembles an avalanche.

For some, making a difference is no more complicated than signing a SPAN (Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network) petition each year. For others, like Jerry and Elsie Weyrauch, who founded SPAN, making a difference is an effort that involves their entire beings. And, since SPAN

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Regarding the Death of My Son, Thomas R. Canlas, who died on August 17, 2000

By Thomas R. Canlas's Dad

normalcy of growing up. He was hitchhiking across the country from early teens. He lived alone with me off and on in Southern California through much of his high school years. He was able to kick the drug problem after a short while...but the alcohol problems remained with him to the very end...Thank God he had the AA supporting him all those year (many times he would go to two meetings in one day). In addition to drink, he had to endure a variety of health problems — many brought about through work related (construction) accidents. When you add the sever problems of depression to Tom's being, your heart has to cry out "WHY?"

Tom had lived in many different places, but two years ago, he left Ventura, CA to live with me in Vegas. Finally, a year and a half ago he began receiving professional counseling through the VA (for both mental and physical health). His life seemed to be on an upswing at that point. Especially these last six months. He found regular employment with an established company; began to save money; had a checking account and a credit card — he always had a winning personality but now he was going out socially on occasion with friends. He and I were very close...we hung out at the library enjoying and sharing the same nov-

I have six children. The one "assumed" as the "problem child" was Tom. From early high school on he just could not conform to the

els, the same movies. He loved music and had a passion for the oldies, as well as the classics. He even began running with me to lose a couple of pounds...and to really round it off for me, he began, but not every day, going to daily morning Mass with me — receiving the Body and the Blood. I was beginning to feel a measure of Peace and Hope I hadn't experienced before with Tom.

Suddenly, early this August, Tom quit work (right on the spot — no advanced warning) and a few days later, he told me he would like to take a four day holiday in his favorite place in life — Ventura. He rented a car, packed some clothes, I got up at 4 a.m. early morning to see him off on Wednesday. He called me as soon as he got there to assure me all was well. Then he called again the next day to tell me he was 'never so happy riding the bike on the Ventura ocean sidewalks' and said he'd see me in a couple of days. I was so happy for him. Friday, the next day, they found the light of my life in the hotel room he rented...he had shot himself with a gun he had purchased here in Vegas.

It is over seventy days now...and the devastation is as piercing as that first moment. Tommy left a letter for me...written just before. ...I've written to him (as well)... Please feel free to use it... In this 'sharing,' it might provide a measure of comfort to others. Our hearts are broken...our lives will never be the same. How could this have happened to our Thomas? He was gentle and caring — a quiet sense of humor — penetrating green eyes that often twinkled — none of us can recall when he ever

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members first delivered signed petitions to their congressional representatives five years ago, suicide awareness and prevention have appeared on the nation's radar screen. We told our elected officials about the magnitude and tragedy of suicide — and they listened.

There was a time when I wasn't sure I could live through my father's suicide in 1973 — compounded when his only brother, my Uncle Gary, ended his life in 1990 — let alone become a national advocate for suicide prevention. The 17 years between their deaths were a long stretch of just getting through, burying feelings.

Approximately 10 years ago, I made my way to a Survivors of Suicide Support Group meeting at The Link Counseling Center in Atlanta, GA. Iris Bolton, director of The Link, is internationally known for her advocacy work and teaching skills. Iris is a mainstay in several national suicide prevention organizations, and she's been leading support groups for more than two decades, sessions rich with her compassion and wisdom.

For the first time, I sat with people who could finish my sentences for me. When they said, "I know what you mean," I knew that they really got it. Hope took root, and my healing began. So did the opportunity to help others, something I once thought impossible.

Eventually, Iris asked me to facilitate a small group at the SOS meetings. The Link draws about 40 people a month; the gathering is divided into smaller groups so everyone gets a chance to talk. I did that. And it helped because I was able to see through the eyes of others that I was healing.

Soon afterward, Iris' assistant retired, and I took on the "part time" job. Iris and I traveled, taught, took calls from survivors, facilitated and started new support groups, trained Atlanta-area survivors (and later those from around the country) who wanted to be part of the SOS support team, and managed team visits to families, schools and businesses after a suicide had taken place.

I learned and grew under Iris' gentle tutelage, and my soul continued to mend. A passion grew to turn the tragic deaths of two good men into help for others. Something good had to come of it, so their unnecessary deaths could stand for positive change.

When business dictated a move to Virginia in 1996, I packed up all that Iris taught me, all of the power to heal that starts with caring and love, all of the wisdom borne of grief too deep to measure, and transferred my work and passion here. There wasn't a survivors of suicide group in my community — so I started one — and soon after I arrived, county residents started a suicide prevention coalition that I was asked to chair.

Iris says, with her wonderful laugh, that she feels like a mother hen, watching her little chicks grow, find their wings, and then take off, soaring like eagles. It seems that eagles from metro Atlanta, and around the country, come from all walks of life.

They are people like the Weyrauchs. After their physician daughter ended her life, they attended and established support groups in metro Atlanta and were members of the SOS Support Team. When the time was right, Jerry used the planning skills he learned from the military and his business background to launch SPAN.

Sandy Martin lost her only child, Tony, to suicide. She was a hairdresser — now she's a successful Realtor — and

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Call for Volunteers

Help is needed as we prepare for the 2001 Alive and Running Walk/Run fundraiser for the Suicide Prevention Center.

You can participate in several ways: recruiting volunteers for race day, asking local businesses to donate gift certificates or prizes for Walk/Run participants, helping to put out mailings, leaving registration forms at local businesses and brainstorming on ways to make the event more fun and successful. We appreciate and need your help. No experience is necessary.

Please come to our next meeting February 13, 2001 at Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center, 4760 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Culver City, CA 90230. For more information or directions please call Laurie at 310.751.5372. □

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she designs and sells Lifekeepers jewelry. She's also the originator of the National Lifekeepers Quilt Project.

Bill Glover once thought that anyone who attended a support group was a sissy. Then came the night that he and his wife, Joan, found their only child, Billy, dead in their home, the family's firearm in his hand. Now, Bill says as he envelops yet another SOS newcomer in a bear hug, he knows there are no sissies in support groups.

Marilyn Koenig, with Friends for Survival in northern California, reaches others through a national newsletter. She's a single mom and bank employee whose son ended his life. She raised a large family of children, and jokes about someday doing well enough financially to afford jelly for those peanut butter sandwiches.

Al and Mary Kluesner of Minneapolis launched SA\VE (Suicide Awareness\Voices of Education) after two of their children ended their lives. With billboards and teaching programs that deliver a no-nonsense message — "The # 1 cause of suicide is untreated depression" — they've touched thousands and gained influence at home and in Washington, D.C.

Reese Butler founded the Kristin Brooks Hope Center in Virginia shortly after his wife's suicide in 1998, followed by the loss of his job. He's the founder and director of the National Hopeline Network (1-800-SUICIDE), which makes the nation's existing certified crisis centers and suicide prevention hotlines accessible through one toll-free telephone number. Now, the Hopeline is recognized as the nation's suicide prevention hotline — and it's already saving lives.

Is a project with national significance necessary to make a difference? Certainly not. At first, just getting through the day requires Herculean energy. To do more may be unthinkable, even unimaginable. But for some, reaching out to change attitudes, to help other survivors, or to work in suicide prevention becomes an important part of their own healing.

Five years ago, while helping with SPAN's petition-signing campaign, I walked the halls of the U.S. Congress to deliver our message. We carry shoes to signify the person — in my case, people — we lost to suicide. Time and again, security guards, congressional aides and passer-by people stopped me to ask about the work boots I carried. Time and again, I told them about the lives and deaths of Ed and Gary Marshall. Time and again, they told me about a loved one they had lost to suicide.

Seeing the resolutions recognizing suicide as a public health concern pass the House and Senate was enormously gratifying. I asked my mother and aunt, who

worked in Michigan's state legislature, to see if our home state would adopt similar resolutions. Both houses did, unanimously.

Then, I met Virginia State Senator Bill Mims about two years ago. After discussing county issues, I slid a copy of the U.S. resolutions across the table to him and asked, "Do you think Virginia would pass something like this?"

He agreed to look at it. I heard nothing more from him until the Virginia legislature went into session in January 1999. Sen. Mims handed his bill to me worded quite like the national resolutions, but including a statewide study of suicide.

Nearly a year later, I sat in his office as the state Department of Health people who conducted the study gave him the results. In Virginia, it seems there are nearly twice as many suicides as homicides.

"Wait a minute, say that again," he interrupted. He repeated that phrase often during the conversation as he learned that youth suicide has soared 150 percent in 20 years, that two Virginians end their lives every day, and that the leading reason for hospitalizing children is depression — followed closely by bi-polar disorder (manic depression) and intentional injury.

Virginia's legislature is solidly conservative; most new programs aren't funded the first year they're introduced. But after Senator Mims introduced his bill allocating money for the development of a suicide prevention plan, it passed. He didn't get as much money as he asked for, but it's a start. I'm proud to say that I'm part of the task force developing that plan.

Earlier this year, I made the decision to leave my career as a journalist to work with Reese Butler and the National Hopeline Network. Already, we've met with senators and their staff to work out the details of a \$3 million amendment to upgrade the nation's crisis centers (more than 700 of the), to boost AAS's ability to certify more centers (78 are accredited by them now), to build the Hopeline Network into a national suicide prevention hotline. The bill awaits the President's signature — updates will be provided.

No, I couldn't prevent my Dad's or Uncle Gary's deaths. But, maybe the lessons I've learned and the work I do in their memories will make a difference in someone's life — someone who might not have been reached but for the Kluesners, Sandy Martins, Iris Boltons, Marilyn Koenigs, Bill Glovers and all the rest. Indeed, it takes all of us, and efforts great and small, to make a difference.

Reprinted from *Surviving Suicide*, published by the American Association of Suicidology, Vol. 12, No. 2, Fall 2000. Our sincere thanks to Karen for permission to use her very helpful article. □

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made a negative remark about another person — he had that 'green thumb' and loved to create in the garden — a passion for nature in general — very practical and down to earth about most things. He was a GENUINE person. He was but forty years old...and he has taken himself away from us — we don't know why. It is over seventy days now...our devastation is as piercing as that first moment."

Tom's letter:

Dad Thursday, 8-17-00

There is a lot of meaning in that word for me. Dad = Thanks. Thanks for allowing me an opportunity. Your hospitality and patience went a long ways in giving me comfort.

But — Alas...I must say that I'm sorry for bringing grief, embarrassment and focus on the family. I'm glad I caught you in at Mona's today. I'd like to wish that I was capable of maintaining and doing which is necessary to live a life. I cherish the nearly six months I had as part of your life. I mean that with all love and gratitude. I already miss you much. I wish it weren't so. My trip to Ventura had evolved over time into a purposeful trip. Please Believe as I do, that rather than a seemingly tragic and violent ending, that hopefully it's a new beginning. If a form of Consciousness remains then — KNOW that I will always LOVE YOU and will watch over YOU. I'll always miss you. Please give Love and regards to Mom and the rest of the family. Forever in my heart.

Love you Dad — Son Thomas R.

Pops: Wish I could see you one last time. TC

Thomas:

In that moment of your birth
you brought a wondrous joy to my being
You were pure goodness with a dual spirit
of giving and needing
You touched my soul in a most special way
Your needs you never had to say:
To Love and Be Loved...without reservation
To provide that to You...with no hesitation
I see you in those early years...a needing to "belong"
That smile of innocence upon your face — moments when
you were strong

I so loved you in those growing years — your hope held
high above your fears

Your values always set apart..."conforming" was not
within your heart

You traveled far — you often went in search of Peace...so
much time was spent

Your needs in sight of Heaven's gate — Lord, please, just a
little more Faith

There were times you reached to touch and share
God forgive us...we were too busy to be there

We'd lend a helping hand or place to stay but eventually,
we'd tell you to "be on your way"

My heart is breaking as I write...tears blotting out my sight
As I ponder the years gone by — for all your stormy
moment...I do know, you tried!

In the valley of your confusion — others thought you cared
for naught

When in truth...It was only peace you sought

Tom, most of us live in the Hope of Light

We did not know of your darkness...

We pursue our senses and the simpleness of sight

We are caught up in the trivias of living

Little time to tend the lost sheep...no time for the Giving

You struggled with demons often strong

Seldom a time when you felt you "belonged"

Much of your life you lived 'midst pain...

with little ado, you endured the shame...as we passed you
off time and again

To our sorrow, we can share in the blame

What do we know of those moments...the shadow across
your mind

The tortured conflict of "tomorrow's"...your pain that
comes in time

Then your Angles hovered over You, and whispered: "It's all
right, Thomas —

God is a God of Love...he loves you without reservation;
time for your light...you have fought the good fight!"

I cannot talk of "what could be..."

Thomas, you took the course that set you free

You cared enough to tell me so...thank God, you chose to
let me know

Now, Tom, you are gone from sight and we miss, we love
you more...with all our might

There will never be a closing to our prayers for you,
Tommy boy

Every tear and every thought rises to God as a rainbow of
emotion...

And right now, as of this moment, Tom, you know better
than we, the Promise of God:

For this is Not the end my son, we will again embrace in
the world to come...

And from all of us who love you...though we will never be
the same, this we know:

The measure of a man is how he was loved

Then surely, Thomas, you are embraced by the Power above
Can't wait to see you again, Tom.

Your Dad

□

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Suicide Update

By Jay Nagdimon, Ph.D.

This information is excerpted from the Dr. Bob Goldney's presidential address at the 20th Congress of the International

Association for Suicide Prevention. Additional information is introduced for clarification by Jay Nagdimon.

According to the World Health Organization, approximately one million people die by suicide every year. Another twenty million attempt suicide. Dr. Goldney points out that if we assume that everyone who dies by suicide leaves behind an average of five other persons who are severely impacted, then at least 100,000 people are immediately affected to some degree by suicidal behavior each year. This is a tremendous number and points both to the magnitude of the problem and the requisite urgency felt by those working to prevent suicide. Still, the path forward remains obscured by methodological problems endemic to researching this deadly problem and, despite the large number of affected individuals, there exists considerable difficulty in finding large and uniform groups of suicidal individuals to participate in treatment studies.

Dr. Goldney asserts that the two main approaches to the study of suicide, the "sociological" and the "biological" should not be mutually exclusive. He cites numerous examples in which there exists a complex interaction between the two influences. Environmental pressures interact with brain chemistry and brain chemistry affect how the person interacts with the environment. Dr. Goldney reminds us that there is no basis for believing that the occurrence of suicide is unrelated to genetic factors. The contribution of genetic factors has been "shown unequivocally in the last twenty years since the classic Danish adoption studies...and subsequent work [reviewed by Roy et al., 2000]." He cites a large study of 3,000 twin pairs which discovered that 45% of the occurrence of suicidality could be attributed to genetic factors and unrelated to known risk factors such as mental illness, history of traumatic events, unemployment, or divorce.

Another thrust of Dr. Goldney's address was the similarity of suicidal features worldwide. Although there is a strong stigma surrounding mental illness in many countries, researchers are able to make valid comparisons of the rates and nature of mental illnesses across the globe. Dr. Goldney reports that a 1995 study by Cheng discovered that by using carefully constructed tests, diagnoses of mental illness similar to those found in the United States in frequency and in type were shown among three groups of Chinese. Similar

studies also showed these similarities in England, Hungary, Sweden, and Australia.

Another topic of much recent interest is the impact the media plays in suicide. Clear associations have been demonstrated between the presentation of or reporting of suicide in the media and the occurrence of imitative suicides. Yet it is interesting to note that the best estimates suggest that no more than 5% of all adolescent suicides could be accounted for by media influence and the proportion of suicides in older age groups is even less. Citing work by researchers Gunnell and Frankel, Dr. Goldney reports that the impact of the media on suicide may be as little as one percent.

Dr. Goldney raises some important points about suicide research. The most rigorous scientific research has two properties. The first property is that the effect of any proposed treatment on a group of participants is compared with another group which did not receive that treatment (and there are serious ethical concerns involved when the topic of study is suicide). The second property requires that conclusions may only be reached if there is a high degree of certainty that such effects did not occur by chance. Given that the frequency of suicide in the United States is approximately 13 in every sample of 100,000 Americans a very large study of suicidal people must be conducted in order to guard against the effects of chance. An example will help illustrate this point. Let's say we wished to test a new therapy for suicidal individuals who have made at least one previous suicide attempt. In this study we hope to achieve a 15% reduction in the number of completed suicides compared in the treatment group compared to a group which didn't receive the treatment. If we were to be successful and a 15% reduction was realized, then we must be certain that this reduction occurred because of our therapy and not just by chance. In order to be reasonably certain that the finding is correct, we must use a large number of participants in the study. Taking into account the frequency of completed suicide, this study would require almost 45,000 subjects. Obviously this sort of research is practically impossible.

Despite research problems, Dr. Goldney remains hopeful about finding suicide prevention programs which work and can be scientifically evaluated. There are scattered reports of suicide prevention programs which have coincided with reductions in suicide rates and he reports that Lester, in 1997, found statistical proof that crisis lines reduce suicide rates. In reference to the latter finding, Dr. Goldney speculates that the

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establishment of suicide prevention centers in addition to their direct impact is generally "perceived by individuals in the community as an indication that the community cares, thereby providing hope to those who are suicidal."

Another interesting finding remarked upon was the 34% reduction in suicide in the U.S.S.R. between 1984 and 1988 after the introduction of strict restrictions and taxes on the sale of alcohol. While there may be many factors which could account for, or contribute to the reduction in suicide, researchers noted that alcohol seemed to influence 50% of the suicides they studied. In the United States, those states with a minimum drinking age of 18 have an 8% higher rate of suicide among 18- to 20-year-olds compared to states with the 21 age limit.

Lastly, Goldney reports on the well designed research which demonstrates reductions in suicide when anti-depressants and mood-stabilizers are appropriately used. For people with schizophrenia,

suicide occurs at a rate of approximately 63 per 100,000. Yet when treated with the medication clozapine, one researcher found that the rate reduced to nearly equal to that of non-mentally ill adults (13 per 100,000). Similar reductions have been reported in studies involving the mood stabilizer lithium, frequently used to treat bipolar illnesses. Yet he believes the problem of stigma prevent many from recognizing the symptoms of mental illness in themselves or prevent them from seeking treatment. We must work towards the day when it is as comfortable to request a psychiatric evaluation as it is to request a physical one.

In a parting statement, Dr. Goldney asserts that we "have a responsibility to ensure that those [with mental illness] receive the best available treatments. This will require firm advocacy for such services, not only by professionals, but also by volunteers, by those who are suffering (sometimes referred to as consumers), and also by their families or caretakers." At the Suicide Prevention Center of Didi Hirsch, we heartily agree. □

SPAN-USA Advocacy Letters

By Sam Bloom
President, SPAN-California

It's that time of year when we ask each of you to sign and have your friends and family sign advocacy letters. The letters advocate that members of Congress and the Governor should

1.) Direct resources to implement a National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) and 2.) Provide accessible and affordable mental health services.

The Office of the Surgeon General is developing the NSPS. It is expected to be introduced in the near future. It will provide a blueprint for the Nation. Its recommendations will be implemented by state and local governments, school districts and private sector agencies.

SPAN-California has been advocating to state and federal government bodies through public hearing testimony that, when a mental health program is being designed or revised, the planners should ask the question, "Is suicide a consideration here?" If it is, then appropriate suicide prevention components should be incorporated in that program. Today this is not always the case and is one reason so many elders suffering from depression, who have visited their primary care provider recently are not diagnosed or treated. Depression screening can and should be done for older adults.

SPAN-USA has been active this past year participating in numerous suicide and mental health conferences, coordinating the Council of National Organizations Partnered for Suicide Prevention and is currently

in the planning phase of its Sixth Annual Suicide Prevention Awareness Event to be held in Washington, DC on May 10th through the 12th, 2001. If you're interested in attending, call SPAN-USA (888.649.1366) for information and to register. A primary activity of the Event will be to walk the halls of Congress and personally deliver the advocacy letters we collect from Californians who are interested in contributing to the reduction of suicide in our nation, state and community.

So please take a few minutes and remove the BLANK ADVOCACY LETTER INSERT from this newsletter, make some copies, sign your letter and get five or ten signed by others. Send them to the SPAN-USA address (5034 Odins Way, Marietta, GA 30068). It might interest you to know, last year when we included this notice and blank advocacy letter in the newsletter; we received very few signed letters. It was very disappointing. So this year we're counting on each of you to respond.

Thank you for your cooperation and support. □

New Support Group

If you have witnessed a suicide, or have been physically close to a loved one at the time of death, a special support group is now forming in West LA.

Please contact Carole Chasin at 310-751-5370 for more information.

Bereavement Journey... from 8 months' perspective.

By Faith Kelman, Director of Bereavement,
Hospice Volunteers and Spiritual Care for
Kaiser Hospice, Kaiser Permanente Continuing Care,
Valleys Service Area

On February 3, 2000, my son took his own life. He was thirty years old, a UCLA honors grad, Phi Beta Kappa, and a graduate of Hastings Law. After graduation he worked for the District

Attorney's office until clinical depression overcame him. He worked very, very hard fighting his illness. He was a talented poet and musician, a cat lover, a lover of people, a member of Foothill Christian church and a Sunday school teacher. In his short life he touched many with his goodness. Once he said to me, "Ma, I guess I don't want to grow up." Another time he said, "Ma, I don't know if I want to live the rest of my life this way." Towards the end we think his illness rolled in on him as a storm comes upon a ship at sea. He had so much love and support and concern around him. He left his cats unattended for many hours, very unlike him. He didn't leave a suicide note, but on his bedroom floor the police found a poem. We don't know when he wrote it. It expressed his anxiety, terror and his frantic need for Peace. It closed with the words, "Who would have thought I would ever come to this?"

I am a bereavement counselor working for Hospice. For now, I can validate for my volunteer group leaders and hospice volunteers something of what grief after suicide feels like, for me. I am hoping I may have some thoughts useful to your healing process too. Here goes:

1) Whether or not you have much of a faith practice, and whether you realize it or not, you are now on a spiritual journey. One trusted friend of many years wrote a couple things to me that have helped me very much, "...always keep your son in your heart, and read the Psalms." I read one every day and try to write down a verse or phrase that reaches out to me. If you try this this might happen to you. You may be surprised at how much counsel and understanding of your grief is in your daily Psalm. Another wonderful companion is Joyce Rupp's book, *Praying Our Goodbyes*. Many of her other books are helpful also. She suggests we "read the book of Exodus." You can find her books in the spiritual section of Barnes and Noble.

2) A Rabbi friend and teacher counseled: "I should not fear my son was now alone or lost. He is in good company. But he has healing to do, and perhaps pain, as he looks at the life he might have lived. Part of his healing is to help heal his loved ones.

What a comforting thought. As the liturgy of Judaism reminds us, our loved ones are "out of the reach of our

hands, but surely not out of the reach of our hearts." This helps me to be reassured that as my son's soul journey helps to heal me, so too can my love, prayers, and thoughts, help to heal him...almost daily I send a prayer for his blessing: May the Lord bless and keep you and make his face to shine upon you...and may you be healed, and know we love you, and may you help to heal us...

3) I thought while driving along the other day that perhaps one of the greatest acts of trust my son showed was to trust that his family and friends, whom he dearly loved, would be able to withstand and endure his suicide. Suicidal thoughts and ideations are not uncommon to any of us who survive a suicide. The first round of those frightened me a lot. But I talked to those I trusted about them. And I read in Sam and Lois Bloom's writings that this is not an uncommon event with survivors. Just to know these are normal for the course of healing makes it possible to get a grip on them...a very loved person has broken a taboo, has died, has showed how to do this...and now we are confronted with the ways and means and realities and uncertainties and all the things that plagued and haunted the beloved seem to go flying by. It helps to know others have these thoughts and that they can be managed and recede with time. Back to the idea of Trust: my son trusted I would feed him when he was a baby in my arms; he trusted I would catch him when he started to walk, and feed him, and be there for him all these years...Somehow he now trusts me to be strong enough to be party of choosing Life, and helping heal and repair my own life and that of other loved ones.

4) There are so many tears, at unexpected times and places. Rev. Alice Zuilli at Glendale Adventist Hospital Beyond Loss Program gave me a book everyone must read: *Tear Soup*, by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen. It's about Grandy "an old and somewhat wise woman" who has a terrible loss and begins cooking "Tear Soup." A huge batch of tear soup is in order, and quite correct. This grief is a seven-headed hydra. You think you have chopped off a head. Then another comes along...and another...and another. Keep stirring "Tear Soup"...go deep enough, long enough, to find your soul again and be healed.

5) Art has helped me. At the Norton Simon is a wonderful painting by Diego Riveera of the Flower Woman, a little woman kneeling with a great bunch of calla lilies. Every time I see that picture, I sit and look at it and cry. I never paid much attention to that picture before. And there are the paintings of Andrew Wyeth and Georgia O'Keefe, Charles Munch, Marc Chagall and so many more. Color and form speak to me, as they never have

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before. I have even gotten some watercolors and begun to splash on paper. Another wonderful book is the coloring book, *Magic Mandala* by Martha Bartfeld, and *Sacred Geometry for Healing*...how these have calmed and centered me. And Gardens have helped me and music has helped me.

6) I was at a camp called Far Horizons in the High Sierras where there is a medicine wheel in the ground. One afternoon I went by myself and took some of my son's poems with me. I don't know much about medicine wheels, but I faced one direction after another and I picked a poem at random and I read it. One was about mourning; not getting stuck, but trusting and moving on until the time to be together again; another was about a "genuine man" — who he is; a third was about coming to a crossroads and taking time to find out where your soul needs to go; and the last one, where I let the wind blow open the page, was about imagination and how one can use memories and imagination to find oneself with a beloved one. After I read each poem, I talked to my son. At the last poem I told him that I could imagine

a time when the pain would be less, and we would know joy again, both of us, and be able — as the heart does — to share with one another. I had some broken shells with me and I took them to the center of the wheel and laid them down until they almost fit together again, like pieces of a puzzle, as a shell should look. And I prayed that from our brokenness would come wholeness, and from our wholeness, holiness. It helped a lot to do this.

Perhaps you will find rituals of your own to celebrate and heal and repair yourself and your loved one from the heart. I know for myself were God to say to me, "I will give you this child again, but the ending will be the same. Will you do it?" I would still say, "Yes..." I say so many times a day. I love you, my son...and I am proud of who you were and grateful for the joy of knowing you in my life..."

Good journeys to you...and love,
Faith Kelman

Remembering Elisha Gudger Crittenden, known as "Gudge" □

Our thanks and love to Faith for writing this poignant original article.

Book Review

by Lois A. Bloom

"But I Didn't Say Goodbye,

by Barbara Rubel"

Suicide Survivor Barbara Rubel whose father, a retired New York City police officer, died by suicide while she was in labor giving birth to her triplets, has written a pragmatic, insightful book. The author says her book is for parents and professionals to help child suicide survivors. It would also help grandparents, aunts, uncles, and caregivers.

Helen Fitzgerald, author of *The Grieving Child* says "But I Didn't Say Goodbye" is a wonderfully, new, refreshing and practical approach to working with children who are suffering the loss of a loved one due to suicide. Barbara Rubel takes a very difficult topic and creates a manageable path for parents and professionals to follow when helping the young suicide survivor."

Barbara is the director of the Griefwork Center in Kendall Park, NJ and a bereavement counselor who specializes in suicide awareness, prevention and suicide survivor bereavement.

I found one of the most helpful things the author did was to outline how to use her book at the beginning of the book. She says to make sure you give "loving reassurance while respecting the child's questions and silence as the child tries to assimilate their turbulent thoughts."

Part One has short chapters with dialogue between Alex, a fictional ten-year-old boy whose father has just

shot himself, and important people in Alex's life. In the first chapter Alex's mother tells him about his father's suicide. Soon after Alex asks tough questions, "Why did Daddy kill himself? How did he do it? Mom, did he kill himself because of something I said or did?" Following each question are simple, honest answers. Chapters that follow use the same approach, Alex having conversations with someone close to him. His dialogues cover a wide range of questions and issues such as crying, blame, confusion, guilt, etc. In one chapter Alex says to his Mom "I should have talked to him before I went to school or stayed home that day. If I did, he wouldn't have killed himself. I did the wrong thing. I made a big mistake." His Mom tells Alex that his Dad had a disease and going to school was the right thing for him to do. She says that she was home and he still killed himself.

Part Two has a helpful list of bereavement referrals including suicidology web sites. The Appendix lists resources; books for children, teenagers, adults and professionals, magazines, newsletters, videos, resources for schools, etc.

I highly recommend this book. It's an exceptional resource to help children deal with the horrific aftermath of suicide.

To order the book contact: Griefwork Center, Inc. 1999, PO. Box 5104, Kendall Park, NJ 08824, phone: 732-422-0400; Web Site: <www.Griefworkcenter.com> □

SAS's Third "Faces of Suicide" Quilt

By Leslie Hill, SAS's Quilt Coordinator

that's dependent on those persons who have received a kit from me and have not completed their quilt square! The deal is, I need thirteen more squares to make a quilt. So, if you received a kit and have not completed your square, please mail your completed square back to me or call me at 310.670.1854.

Our new quilt will be displayed along with our other two at: the American Association of Suicidology Conference and the Survivor Healing Conference in Atlanta, GA, April 18-21; the SPAN-USA National Awareness Event in Washington, DC on May 10-12 and at our SAS Pot Luck on June 9th.

I will gladly help you if you need assistance. All survivors are invited to make a square for this quilt, just call me and tell me you'd like to make one. Survivors who have contributed a square have told us, they felt making a square was a healing experience and it made them feel "as if they had done something that make a difference."

The first quilts were made in December 1997 when Sandy Martin from Atlanta, GA came up with the idea of having "Lifekeeper Memory Quilts." Sandy says, "My vision for the quilts came to me after being at the first SPAN-USA National Awareness Event in Washington DC." Per Sandy "the purpose of having quilts is to raise suicide prevention awareness and they put faces to the numbers. It's a powerful visual image." Sandy's goal is

We hope to have our third "Faces of Suicide Quilt" completed in early April. Of course

to have all 50 states represented. "Currently" she says, "we have 41 states. States not represented are: Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington DC" (even though DC is not a state).

For the past four years survivors have shown their quilts at the offices of members of congress when we deliver advocacy letters from constituents. People are usually speechless when we show them our quilts. Congressional members have said, "Has everyone on this quilt killed themselves?" After hearing our response they are speechless. And they are shocked when we tell them...there are more suicides in the US every year than homicides, approximately 31,000 suicides and 21,000 homicide! We tell them when The US Surgeon General published his "Call To Action To Prevent Suicide, 1999 he said, "suicide was a serious public health problem." The suicide rate of 85 persons per day in the US and 9 per day in California needs to be significantly lowered. When we show our quilts to senators and representatives we get much more attention. Our reason for advocating is to "ask for their help, to accept the forthcoming National Suicide Prevention Strategy and fund its implementation."

Remember you still have time to make a quilt square. Call (Leslie) at 310.670.1854 but CALL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. If you feel making a square is too difficult for you call and we'll talk about it. Squares need to be completed by March 1st.

Thank you, I appreciate your interest in this very worthy project. □

Signs of Healing and Adapting

By Dr. Judith Bernstein

- The amount of time spent in the clutches of grief diminishes.
- Time between bouts with grief lengthens.
- Sleep and eating habits resume a degree of normalcy.
- Irritability and disorganization subside.
- The ability to concentrate and make decisions returns.
- Flashbacks and preoccupations lessen in frequency and intensity.
- Physical health returns.
- Interest in social activities resumes selectively.
- Resumption of meaningful pursuits begins.
- The bond of emotional attachment loosen as evidenced by: The ability to part with some belongings; The

establishment of new connections with the deceased.

- Visits to the cemetery taper.
- Legal entanglements are brought to a close.
- Happy memories of the loved one return.

These indications of healing are by no means exhaustive and one need not have each one to be on the right track. The manner and timing of healing vary with the individual. Even when healing is coming along well, and perhaps forever after, something will trigger a relapse and you will be back to square one, experiencing grief in all its intensity. However, these bouts, and they are bouts, become less frequent over time; they last a shorter period of time and the intensity diminishes. □

Reprinted from The Compassionate Friends South Bay/LA, CA, December, 2000.

Contributions

September 23, 2000, to
January 12, 2001 – A million
thanks for your generosity.

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Gerry Shacter, Kim Zinner & Ester Rehm
Lorene & Herman Ahrens in honor of Lois &
Sam Bloom
Dr. & Mrs. Sydney Rosin in honor of Barbara
Hornichter

Please use the enclosed envelope for your contributions.
If you have given a contribution recently and it is not
acknowledged in this issue, please call Carole Chasin at
310.751.5370. We apologize for any oversights. □

SPC's New Web Site

If you haven't been to
visit the Suicide Preven-
tion Center on the World

Wide Web, please direct your Internet browser to
www.suicidecrisisline.org.

There you can find information on the Center, the
latest Survivors After Suicide Newsletters and informa-
tion about suicide prevention.

You can even go shopping at SPC's own shopping
mall, where major retail stores have agreed to make a
donation to SPC on every purchase you make. To go
shopping, click on the "To Help SPC" option, click on
"Charitable Shopping," and then click on the large but-
ton in the center of the page.

There you will see all the major retailers with offer-
ings with everything from books, to music, to electron-
ics, to gifts, house wares, flowers, etc.

Future plans for the web site include Spanish lan-
guage versions of suicide prevention and bereavement
material, statistical information about suicide and the
latest news in the area of suicide prevention. If anyone
is interested in helping develop the web site, please
contact Jay Nagdimon at (310) 751-5324. □

Life continues around us, even when our
troubles seem to stop time. There is good in
every day. Take a few minutes to distract your-
self from your concerns long enough to draw
strength from a tree, or to find pleasure in a
bird's song.

— Pamela Owens Renfro



Rev. Alice Parsons Zuilli, Chaplain Associate at Glendale Adventist Medical Center and survivors Michelle Maciel and Chris Humbert at the SAS Holiday Potluck Party on December 16, 2000.

SAS Holiday Potluck, December 16, 2000

By Sam Bloom, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA

The Potluck was another SAS success with forty-one persons attending. The food was great with a variety of entrees and deserts. Ooh, thatcheesecake.

Survivor Coordinator, Carole Chasin planned an inspirational program. Rev. Alice Parsons Zulli, Chaplain at the Glendale Seventh Day Adventist Hospital, shared her experience of losing her father to suicide when she was a child with no opportunity to deal with her loss at that time. Today, Rev. Zulli encouraged the survivors to take the positive attitude and approach to life and to how we deal with our losses, even though they bring us much emotional pain.

Rev. Zulli's presentation was followed by a short remembrance ritual jointly lead by her and Lois Bloom to remember our loved ones.

Our sincere thanks to Rev. Zulli for her inspiring and beneficial program. □

A Letter to My Brother

By Robin Holemon, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Suddenly you are gone. I'm still here. Why? How can this be? Someone will tell me the reason, the answer. How can I fill

the void, the space once so full of life? What will I do? How will I be strong for others when the sting of pain is so real, so near? Though everyone seems calm, my soul screams at the injustice, the unfairness of losing you. I miss you. I think of you every day and feel you in my heart always. Whatever the reason for your leaving, I know your living had a reason.

Despite the brevity of your life, you lived a lifetime's worth. You blessed us with your presence, your specialness. I have only to think of you to feel the joy you've left as a legacy. You shaped the purpose of my life. I can see the world through your eyes. □

From TCF, Marin County & San Francisco Chapters, Dec. 2000.

Calendar of Events 2001

April 18: Hospice Foundation of America

2001 Annual Teleconference, "Caregiving and Loss; Family Needs, Professional Responses", 8 a.m. - 2 p.m. Torrance Memorial Medical Center, 3330 Lomita Blvd., Torrance, CA. For information and pre-registration call Rev. Brad DeFord, Ph.D. 310.784.3754.

April 18-21: American Association of Suicidology Atlanta, GA.

34th American Association of Suicidology Conference (AAS), theme "MIND, BODY & SOUL: Three Dimensions of Suicide," Sheraton Colony Square Hotel, Atlanta, GA. For information call Amy Kulp at 202.237.2280 or check web site: www.suicidology.org.

April 21, Saturday: Atlanta, GA, AAA Annual Healing After Suicide Conference.

Sheraton Colony Square Hotel, Atlanta, GA. For information call Amy Kulp at 202.237.2280 or check web site: www.suicidology.org. Please Note: All survivors are invited to attend.

May 3, Thursday: Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center's "Erasing The Stigma, Leadership Award Luncheon."

This year's honorees are "Dear Abby" (Pauline Phillips, aka Abigail Van Buren and her daughter Jeanne Phillips), co-creators of the Dear Abby column; The Los Angeles Times and the Television Show "ER." Save the date.

May 10-12: SPAN-USA Annual Awareness Event

Letter delivery on Capitol Hill & Congressional Recognition box lunch at Mott House, Candlelight service across the street from the White House, Friday evening, Saturday, Quilt Display on Capital Mall. For information and registration call 888.649.1366, e-mail: spanusa@mindspring.com, web site: www.spanusa.org

June 9, Saturday: SAS Pot Luck to be held at Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Association, 6:30-9 p.m. Program to be announced. Please save the date.

September 7-8: NAMI California State Conference

(Alliance for the Mentally Ill) Torrance Marriott, Torrance, CA, call 916.567.0163 for information.

September 16: Alive & Running 5/10 K

Walk/Run & Kiddies K. Call Laurie Houlihan if you would like to volunteer to help, 310.751.5444. Save the date. Mark your calendars now. □

Reprint Policy

You are welcome to reprint material from our newsletter if you are a non-profit support organization that produces periodicals. We do require the item include the author's name and title and the following:

“Reprinted with permission from the *Survivors After Suicide Newsletter*; a Program of the Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center: Suicide Prevention Center, 4760 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Culver City, CA 90230”

and also include the issue date and year the article appeared. Kindly send us a copy of any reprints for our authors to the attention of Lois A. Bloom, Editor.

Thank you.

Survivors After Suicide Newsletter

A quarterly publication of Survivors after Suicide (a support group for those who have lost a loved one to suicide), a Program of the Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health: Suicide Prevention Center, 4760 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Culver City, CA 90230, (310) 751-5324. Crisis Line Number (310) 391-1253. Editor: Lois A. Bloom. Editorial Board: Samuel C. Bloom; David Davis; Norman Farberow, Ph.D.; Ollie LaPlant; Rissa Potter; and Jay Nagdimon, Ph.D. Thanks to Cecilia Urwin for layout, Johnny Lowe for design; and to Jay Nagdimon, Ph.D., Carole Chasin for proofreading, and the staff at SPC for — mailing the *SAS Newsletter*.

Didi Hirsch CMHC
SAS-SPC
4760 S. Sepulveda Blvd.
Culver City, CA 90230

Address Correction Requested

Mailing list changes cannot be made unless corrected or duplicate labels are mailed to SAS at the address above.

Important Phone Numbers and Resources



Help Lines

Suicide Prevention Center Crisis Line — http://www.suicidecrisisline.org — LA County	1.877.727.4747
Suicide Prevention Center Crisis Line outside LA County	1.310.391.1253
Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center	1.310.390.6612
Friends for Survival/Survivor Line (Sacramento)	1.916.392.0664
Trevor Helpline (Suicide Hotline for gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning youth)	1.800.850.8078
	http://www.trevorproject.com
National "YOUTH" Crisis Helpline	1.800.999.9999
National Suicide Prevention Crisis Line 1.800.SUICIDE (800.784.2433) 24-hrs. connects with local certified help	

Resources

AAS, Amer. Assoc. Suicidology (professional training/education/research/prevent/survivors)	1.202.237.2280
	http://www.suicidology.org
AFSP, Amer. Foundation/Suicide Prevention (research & education)	1.888.333.2377
	http://www.afsp.org
Bell Campaign (freedom from gun trauma)	1.800.746.4464
	http://www.bellcampaign.org
Compassionate Friends/South Bay, LA	1.310.368.6845
Compassionate Friends, Inc. (parents grief)	1.630.990.0010
	http://www.compassionatefriends.org
	chat room 10am-11:00pm
CDC, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control	http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc
HRSA, Health Resources/Services Admin.	http://www.hrsa.gov
Jason Foundation, Youth Education	1.888.881.2323
Link's National Resource Center for Suicide Prevention & Aftercare	1.404.256.9797
NAMI, National Alliance for Mentally Ill http://www.nami.org	1.800.950.6264
NAMI-California	1.916.567.0163
NIMH, National Institute/Mental Health	http://www.nimh.nih.gov
NMHA, National Mental Health Association (Depression Screening & Treatment Referrals)	1.800.969.6642
NOPCAS, Nat .Org. People of Color Against Suicide	1.512.245.2113
SAMHSA, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services	http://www.samhsa.gov
SIEC, Suicide Information/Education Center	http://www.siec@siec.ca 1.403.245.3900
SPAN-USA, Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network	http://www.spanusa.org 1.888.649.1366
SPAN-California	1.310.377.8857
SA/VE, Suicide Awareness/Voices of Education http://www.save.org	1.612.946.7998
Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Project http://www.yellowribbon.org	1.303.429.3530

Internet Support

http://www.webhealing.com — Articles of interest.	Editor's Note: If you have anything to add to this page please contact Carole Chasin at 310-751-5370. Thank you.
http://www.griefnet.org — Grief support.	
http://www.opn.com/willowgreen.com — Grief, faith & hope site	
http://www.1000deaths.com — SOLOS Survivor support & suicide prevention	
http://www.onelist.com/subscribe/parentsofsuicides — Support for parents of suicides	
http://www.sos.golflv.com — Survivor help (Linda Flatt lost son to suicide)	
http://www.sascha@aol.com — L.A.R.G.O., Life After Repeated Grief: Options (Sascha Wagner)	
http://www.lib.ox.ac.uk/internet/news/faq/archive/suicide.info/htm — Survivor inf., books, etc.	

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Suicide Prevention Center Crisis Line outside LA County 1.310.391.1253

Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center 1.310.390.6612

Friends for Survival/Survivor Line (Sacramento) 1.916.392.0664

Trevor Helpline (Suicide Hotline for gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning youth) 1.800.850.8078 www.trevorproject.com

National Suicide Prevention Crisis Line 1.800.SUICIDE (800.784.2433) 24-hrs. connects with local certified help

RESOURCES

AAS, Amer. Assoc. Suicidology (professional training/education/research/prevent/survivors) 1.202.237.2280
www.suicidology.org

AFSP, Amer. Foundation/Suicide Prevention (research & education) www.afsp.org 1.888..333.2377

Compassionate Friends/South Bay, LA 1.310.368.6845

Compassionate Friends, Inc.(parents' grief) 1.630.990.0010 www.compassionatefriends.org- chat room 10am-11:00pm

CDC, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control www.cdc.gov/ncipc

HRSA, Health Resources/Services Admin. www.hrsa.gov

Jason Foundation, Youth Education 1.888.881.2323

Million Mom March & The Bell Campaign 1.888.989.6667, web site: www.millionmommarch.com

Link's National Resource Center for Suicide Prevention & Aftercare 1.404.256.9797

NAMI, National Alliance for Mentally Ill (NAMI) www.nami.org 1.800.950.6264

NAMI-California 1.916.567.0163

NIMH, National Institute/Mental Health www.nimh.nih.gov

NMHA, National Mental Health Association (Depression Screening & Treatment Referrals) 1.800.969.6642

NOPCAS, Nat .Org. People of Color Against Suicide, Dr. Barnsi 1.512.245.8453

SAMHSA, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services www.samhsa.gov

SIEC, Suicide Information/Education Center www.siec@siec.ca 1.403.245.3900

SPAN-USA, Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network www.spanusa.org 1.888.649.1366

SPAN-California 1.310.377.8857

SA/VE, Suicide Awareness/Voices of Education www.save.org 1.612.946.7998

Senate Hearing Testimonies download from <senate.gov/-appropriations/labor/hrgtest.htm

The Surgeon General's Call to Action 1999 download from <www.spanusa.org>

Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Project, Light for Life International www.yellowribbon.org 1.303.429.3530

INTERNET SUPPORT

www.webhealing.com — Articles of interest.

www.griefnet.org — Grief support & a system that can connect you with various resources

www.opn.com/willowgreen.com — Grief, faith & hope site

www.1000deaths.com — SOLOS Survivor support & suicide prevention, movies listed with a rating system

www.onelist.com/subscribe/parentsosuicides — Support for parents of suicides

www.survivingsuicide.com — Survivor help (Linda Flatt lost son to suicide)

[www.sascha@aol.com](mailto:sascha@aol.com) — L.A.R.G.O., Life After Repeated Grief: Options (Sascha Wagner)

www.lib.ox.ac.uk/internet/news/faq/archive/suicide.info/htm — Survivor inf., books, etc.

www.bothsidesofsuicide.com — A survivor support site founded by a survivor Mom

www.twotoomany.com — Deborah Pikul's web site, she lost two brothers to suicide

www.depression.com — dedicated to providing recent information about depression

suicide@rochford.org — a site with info about suicide & suicide prevention

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Newsletter

Jan/Feb/Mar

2001

For additional help lines, suicide prevention information, and resources for mental health and suicide prevention advocate organizations download from <www.spanusa.org>